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Senior Health and Wellness Newsletter

Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living

Senior Bullying

A bully by definition is a quarrelsome, overbearing person who habitually badgers and intimidates smaller or weaker people. Bullying is an aggressive behavior that is intentional and ongoing.

Most people associate bullies and bullying behavior with children, but it encompasses all ages. In 2010, 1 in 5 senior citizens reported being bullied by other senior citizens, which is a higher number than reported by school age children who experienced bullying. This statistic is staggering, but not one that is common knowledge among senior citizens or the general public.

Over the past few years, national media attention and anti-bullying campaigns have greatly increased awareness regarding bullying, especially with school age children, but it has also contributed to the misuse and overuse of the word “bully”. It’s important to understand that bullying behaviors are not the same as arguments, disagreements, differences in opinion, spats, or personality conflicts. Bullying is a behavior that intentionally targets a person or group of persons over and over again.

Bullying can occur in any setting, including senior housing, senior citizen centers, assisted living, nursing homes, and in other locations where seniors are spending a lot of time together.

The most common form of adult bullying is verbal bullying. It involves rumors, name calling, teasing, sarcastic or demeaning language,



intimidation and humiliation. However, it can escalate over time to physical bullying which involves physically harming someone, threatening physical harm or physical domination.

It’s important to recognize that a bully can be anyone including but not limited to staff members, caregivers, companions, family members, residents, neighbors, or participants at senior centers.

There are many reasons why an individual may display bullying behavior including, but not limited to, the following:

- strong individuals who view others as weak
- insecure individuals
- individuals struggling with control because of changes in health and/or independence
- isolated, depressed individuals
- individuals who perceive “differences” as “weaknesses”

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Bullying can be traumatic regardless of age or circumstance. It impacts all who witness it, victims and bystanders. It creates a toxic environment that can lead to fear, stress, and anxiety for all involved. It can also lead to depression, anxiety, isolation and suicide for the victims of bullying.

It's important that action is taken to prevent bullying from occurring and to appropriately address bullying when it occurs so that senior citizens are protected. **Anyone who is the victim of bullying is encouraged to seek support from friends, family, and appropriate staff members. Whether the victim or a bystander, it's important that it be reported to the proper individuals/authorities so that the issue can be addressed.**

Senior bullying is not something new – it has been going on for years, but it has not been addressed or labeled as bullying. It's important that it gets the attention it requires. Individuals need to be educated and empowered to recognize senior bullying and to take a stand against it.

Please Note: Kentucky Revised Statute 209 directs anyone who suspects abuse, neglect or financial exploitation of a vulnerable adult to report it to the appropriate authority. You can report abuse using the 24 hour toll free hotline **1-877-597-2331**, or your local law enforcement agency. Calls may be made anonymously.

For additional information:

- * Contact Amanda Stokes, Pennyriple Area Agency on Aging & Independent Living, at 1-800-928-7233 or by email at amanda.stokes@ky.gov.
- * Visit StopBullying.gov at <http://www.stopbullying.gov/index.html>.

Special Thanks to Amanda Stokes for the provision of this article.

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